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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001899

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
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STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS
DEPT PASS DEA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: POSTCARD FROM LES CAYES: POOR BUT PEACEFUL

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 437
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 1880

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The southern city of Les Cayes does not face the major security concerns common to Port-au-Prince, but social problems stemming from widespread poverty do arise on occasion. Local Haitian National Police grapple with drug trafficking, poor prison conditions and a faulty justice system. MINUSTAH is working with local officials to build desperately needed local government capacity. The political scene is weak and unstructured, and allegiance to political parties flimsy. Disaster recovery efforts, so crucial to this vulnerable area, are feeble. Local GOH officials are under-funded and poorly staffed; the decentralized structure envisioned in the 1987 Constitution and emphasized by the Preval/Alexis government does not yet exist. End Summary.

Local Police

[1](#)2. (C) Haitian National Police (HNP) Departmental Director for the South Henrio Toussaint told Poloff November 16 he has not witnessed political violence since his arrival in Les Cayes in November 2006. Social unrest arises periodically due to poverty and high unemployment, but overall Toussaint described the department as peaceful. The area's biggest problems arise from narco-trafficking, and Toussaint cited the need for air and maritime support to keep shipments from arriving in Haiti. He said the coastal areas are left unguarded, including Ile-a-Vache and other nearby islands. Other major issues include grossly overcrowded and structurally deteriorating prisons, as well as a justice system that "everyone knows does not work." Toussaint professed to have a close working relationship with HNP Director General Mario Andresol, and said he also maintains good rapport with local elected officials. (Note: Toussaint was a member of the Armed Forces of Haiti (FADH) before becoming a member of the intermediary police in 1994 and finally the HNP at its creation in 1995. End note.)

13. (SBU) Armand Patrick Tchi (Cameroon), MINUSTAH Deputy Director of Civil Affairs for the South Department, and MINUSTAH Political Advisor Joseph Lormilus (Haiti) briefed Poloff November 15 on Civil Affairs activities in the South Department. MINUSTAH Civil Affairs Division oversees coordination of the other MINUSTAH sections including humanitarian assistance, human rights and corrections, as well as the military and police. Tchi's office focuses on supporting GOH institutions, and has been leading seminars for elected officials on financial management, project management and communication, among other topics. They also work with local ports and customs authorities and are hiring a specialist in border management to tackle new additions to MINUSTAH's mandate. Civil Affairs has executed several Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), including rehabilitation of city halls, courthouses and health clinics.

Political Party Activity

14. (SBU) Tchi said political parties in the south are loosely organized and often run candidates who are not truly affiliated with their stated party; none of the parties could be considered real institutions. Chavannes Jeune's 'Union' party won the most seats in local and municipal elections in December 2006. However, OPL (Struggling Peoples' Party) is the strongest party in terms of organizational structure. Fanmi Lavalas (FL) is weakening in the South Department. Although the department's first senator, Yvon Buissereth, ran under the FL banner, Lormilus credits his victory to his high-profile position as the director of one of the largest elementary schools in the region. The local FL secretariat has major internal divisions, with four candidates already

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campaigning for the next senate elections under the FL banner. The only politically charged area is Aquin, where local and national politicians, including Deputy Emmanuel Bourjolly (Fusion, Aquin) and Mayor Contant Montellus (Lespwa), recently incited protests over the lack of GOH services. (Note: About 35 miles east of Les Cayes, the commune of Aquin is the largest in land area and second largest in population in the South Department. End note.)

Local Elected Officials

15. (SBU) Many local elected officials have never been administrators and are overwhelmed, according to Tchi. The division of responsibilities between the different elected posts is unclear, leading to confusion around such issues as who collects taxes. Although the mayors receive money each month from the central government, it is not even enough to cover their operating costs. Tchi thought the Ministry of Interior was making a valiant effort to provide training, however. Additionally, the Ministry of Planning runs departmental 'consultation tables' to create department-wide management plans, a model MINUSTAH is attempting to replicate in each commune with the local officials (mayors, county council (ASEC), county district council (CASEC), and city councils). To date, the departmental consultation tables are still in the process of habituating the different sectors to sharing information and working with NGOs, and have not produced any coordinating documents.

Humanitarian Conditions

16. (SBU) Pascale Lefrancois (Canada), MINUSTAH Regional Humanitarian and Development Coordination Officer for South, Grand'Anse and Nippes Departments, told Poloff November 15 that the situation for children in the south is grave. Many

children do not go to school, but rather spend the whole day fetching water for their families. The problem of ''restaveks'' (children sent from poor rural families to work as domestics for wealthy families or less poor family members in the hopes that the child will enjoy a better quality of life; see ref A) is prevalent in the south. Most orphanages in the area are unable to care for the children, with the exception of ''Pwoje Espwa'' (visited during Ambassador's trip to Les Cayes; see ref B) and Sister Flara.

¶7. (SBU) According to Lefrancois, local offices of GOH ministries complain they do not receive enough money from the central government for staff and resources. One local official told Lefrancois he only received 50 percent of the budget allocated to him. Local authorities sometimes resent the NGOs working in the area because they believe NGOs are excluding GOH officials from government work. Lefrancois stated that in her area of responsibility, the Grand'Anse Department is the most in need of international attention. Basic services such as water and electricity are very limited, even in the capital city of Jeremie, and NGO activities are meager.

Disaster Recovery

¶8. (C) Lefrancois reported very poor GOH preparedness for this year's tropical storm season. She said local authorities' disaster management plans were much better in 2006, and included lists of shelters and emergency contacts that they never compiled for 2007. This year local authorities made no effort to evacuate citizens from high-risk areas and the process took a political turn, with politicians arriving after the storms to tally the damages and ''assess how much money they could milk from the central government.'' Last year the GOH coordinated data collection and relief operations with MINUSTAH. This year the GOH did not keep MINUSTAH apprised of their recovery activities, and at times refused to join MINUSTAH teams in distributing emergency supplies such as water purification tablets. MINUSTAH's goal is not only to distribute the supplies, but

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also to increase GOH capacity to respond to disasters, and lack of GOH cooperation torpedoes this process, according to Lefrancois.

A Citizen's View

¶9. (SBU) Les Cayes resident Maguy Joslin told Poloff November 16 that citizens in the south are struggling for basic services. For example, Joslin said SNEP (National Potable Water Service) water is not actually potable, and residents must rely on artesian wells for drinking water. (Note: MINUSTAH Civil Affairs raised this same issue November ¶15. End Note.) GOH ministries such as Public Works have a very small presence in the south, and do not have materials or resources to carry out their functions. Joslin stated, ''Haiti is not decentralized.'' The only social unrest originates with the ''popular sector,'' or lower class, whose members occasionally lead public protests. She said the area has potential for tourism, with beautiful beaches in Port Salut and Ile-a-Vache, but lacks the infrastructure to facilitate travel to such destinations.

¶10. (U) Joslin is the leader of the group ''Valiant Women of the South'' and an active member of civil society in Les Cayes. About 300 women's groups operate in the south, including regional branches of a few national organizations. Joslin said women struggle for respect and face mental and physical abuse in this male-dominated society. Women are not very involved in politics and very few participate in political party strengthening programs run by the National Democratic Institute (NDI, a USAID implementing partner).

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The general sentiment in Les Cayes is that the central government maintains control of resources but does always use them to adequately help the people of the South Department. With the same high levels of unemployment seen throughout Haiti, residents rely on international aid programs and the UN to meet some of their most basic needs. Disaster preparedness will always be an issue in this area, and although we have seen some progress (ref B); the protracted nature of this year's flooding has severely taxed the improved procedures put in place. Programs to increase local government capacity, whether provided by the GOH or the international community, are key to helping the South and other departments face these challenges.

SANDERSON